

Eye *of the* Icon

When it comes to iconic status, some brands have it, while others never will.

What are the greatest threats to a brand's identity today?

Andrea Spiegel: It's incredibly important that everything that brings the brand to life is as consistent as possible. It's when inconsistencies exist that the potential erosion of a brand's identity begins. Inconsistencies usually occur because of silos within an organization, or a lack of oversight of the brand identity.

Another threat is copycats. We protect our brand through trademarks, and are very much a watchdog in terms of what other people are doing to infringe on our space. We see it happening a lot overseas. It could be as obvious as using the word "blue" in the name of the airline. It also happens in terms of product offerings. Others will literally copy almost exactly your product offering.

Joe Tripodi: The greatest threat is a lack of meaningful differentiation—a weak value proposition, a lack of relevance or limited clarity in the mind of the consumer as to what the brand stands for. Too many line extensions can also be a problem. Some brands go into spaces that the customer really doesn't give them permission to go into.

A brand's identity has to be constantly nurtured and nourished in order to thrive. It's when companies decide to milk their brands, not invest in them or let them become stagnant, that they lose relevance and energy. That's the "doom loop" for a lot of brands.

Kellie Krug: At Visa, we spend a lot of time looking at marketing with partners. The opportunity—or threat—is how to develop those partnerships so that they deliver on the promise of the Visa brand while also delivering on the promise of the partner brand.

Other challenges involve new communications channels, and figuring out when your customer wants to be reached and with what kind of message. How our brand identity comes together for an individual consumer is a rich place to explore in terms of becoming much more targeted and relevant in the marketplace.

Zain Raj: One of the greatest threats is the fundamental shift in the pace of change. Right now, the pace of change is so fast that if I were to drive some level of innovation, somebody else will be

out there within 60 to 90 days with the same thing and I will have no point-of-difference anymore.

As a result, a huge amount of commoditization is starting to occur across every category. This commoditization is leading to a high degree of homogenization, which is eroding brand identities. This lack of meaningful innovation makes it very hard for a brand to stand apart and sustain a competitive advantage.

How much control should consumers have in shaping brand identity?

Spiegel: The JetBlue brand identity was built so quickly because of word-of-mouth, which shaped who we are today. So, we welcome an open dialogue with our customers. If we're hearing a universal belief or suggestion, we will take it very seriously and make changes based on it.

However, there is a bit of a danger in giving consumers too much control because, at the end of the

A ROUNDTABLE FEATURING

Andrea Spiegel
JetBlue Airways

Joe Tripodi
Allstate Insurance

Kellie Krug
Visa U.S.A.

Zain Raj
Euro RSCG Chicago

The beauty of Allstate's brand identity has been its consistency.

JOE TRIPODI

day, you have to run your business the way that it needs to be run, based on your expertise.

Giving customers control doesn't mean that they should necessarily create your advertising. In fact, I think that the more we see that happening, the less of an appetite there's going to be for it.

Tripodi: Fundamentally, the consumer should have some control in shaping the brand identity. But clearly the consumer is not going to be creating a communication strategy. The marketer has to lead that strategy based on consumer insights and by listening to the consumer constantly.

Ultimately, the consumer is going to be rooted in the foundation of what the brand stands for, and that's what the marketer needs to communicate. Where some brands get into trouble is when there's a huge gap between your stimuli — the marketing communication — and the actual customer experience.

Krug: Visa recently embarked on a mobile-phone pilot with PacBell Park in conjunction with the San Francisco Giants. The idea was that consumers would use their mobile phones to take pictures of themselves or their friends using their Visa cards within the park. Then they sent us their photos via their mobile phones and we posted them throughout the game on a jumbo screen.

It was really interesting for us to think about this program as a way to bring the Visa brand to a very specific group of cardholders within the confines of the park. It engaged consumers at a different level, while also supporting our underlying business strategy of having a Visa product be part of a transaction.

Raj: It's a very ironic question that comes out of the old-world arrogance of traditional marketing. The fundamental belief has been that if you advertised your product, you could build a brand's identity through awareness alone. But that's never really been true.

now in the hands of consumers as opposed to the marketers, there is a lot less control over the message. But if your brand stands for something, and your customers get it, then they are going to talk about you in that same voice. It's almost a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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ANDREA SPIEGEL

A brand has never been anything but a relationship that consumers have with a product or service that fulfills a need in their lives. Consumers have always had the power to define what brands are going to stand for, and what role the brand is going to play either in their lives or in the context of the marketplace.

If you think about it, 100 years ago, brands were built by consumers talking to each other. Today, the internet and other technologies allow consumers to engage in that kind of conversation again, and the brands that succeed will be those that give them as much of an active role as they used to have.

Is advertising still as important as it once was to a brand's identity?

Spiegel: I absolutely think advertising is as important as ever. The interesting point here is the different forms advertising takes today. There are so many more options — and so many more channels — that advertising has become much more complicated.

In addition, with so much content

I do think advertising has become more complicated and we have much less control over what that message is. That makes it more important to keep the message simple — the simpler the message and the more true we are to our brand and what we stand for, the more effective our communications are going to be whether they are marketing-led or consumer-led.

Tripodi: I think advertising is just as important. Advertising helps us create a consistent message and tone that we can control. It allows us to imbue the brand with continued relevance. It allows us to seed in differentiation and speak to new products or services.

We also shape the brand's identity through sponsorships, promotions, the retail experience — and through our bills. It doesn't matter if people saw a great television commercial if they then get a bill in the mail that's wrong or if they call us and the phone's not picked up for two minutes.

The real challenge for marketers is to navigate between message, media, consumer segment, geography and time. If you can thread that needle consistently, you will find that the return on

your marketing investment is going to be substantially higher than if you're just engaged in "spray and pray."

Krug: Advertising is still important as a very effective way to reach broad groups of people. What we're seeing at Visa—and what a lot of other people in our category are looking at—is whether there are other ways to reach people. There's a much broader sphere of choices to consider when we think about integrated marketing.

Not only are we discussing our options much earlier on, we're also much better informed because of some of the work we've done. We have a better understanding of the effect of an online or an interactive effort, for example.

A couple of years ago these newer options were an after-thought, and based on advertising. Now, we have a lot more data and insights in terms of what combination of activities is going to be the most compelling, based on our business needs.

Advertising will have a role for a while because television still happens to be a fairly cost-efficient way of getting broad reach. It also is a way to communicate the evocative nature of the message. Will the channels change? Yes. Are we moving from mass to more targeted approaches? Yes. Is more targeting allowing us to get the mass reach? Not yet. Will it ever? Sure.

What is the role of retail in brand identity?

Spiegel: When we talk about retail at JetBlue, we're talking about price and how to put special offers into the marketplace in a way that's consistent with our brand. We call that "branded retail."

When we talk about the "JetBlue experience," we're really talking more about the brand in total. We're talking not only about retail but every touchpoint—from

Ultimately, the retail environment is your most obvious opportunity to control what the consumer sees and what they experience. Retail shapes the reality of the brand's identity, whereas marketing communications through traditional media channels shapes the perceptions.

Krug: Retail is where brand identity really comes together for Visa. When we think about retail, we think about one of two things. One is, we continue to open up new channels of acceptance at places like toll-booths, taxicabs and quick-service restaurants.

We also look at retail as a co-marketing opportunity. We have a lot of incredible partners who play solidly and squarely in the retail space—Marriott, Starbucks and Target, for example.

We really try to maximize the deep partnerships that we have with these retail brands to create a lasting and memorable consumer experience. That often manifests itself in a rewards program or in a promotional capacity.

Raj: Retail is a huge component of any brand identity. A brand doesn't get built unless there's a relationship, and a relationship doesn't happen until you have an experience with each other. A brand really gets built when a consumer has the ability to touch, feel, use, experience and enjoy the brand to its fullest potential.

Consumers have that ability within the context of a retail environment. What happens on the shelf—how the brand is displayed, what position it plays on the shelf, how much or how little it gets promoted—defines the context of the experience the consumer has with the brand.

Retail is where brand identity really comes together for Visa.

KELLIE KRUG

Raj: Advertising will continue to be an important part of building brand identity, but it's not necessarily as important as it used to be. Advertising is just an invitation to a brand experience. Like an invitation to a party, it sets an expectation, but the brand is not built by its advertising alone. The brand is built by the experience you have with it, the need it fulfills for you, and how well it fulfills the need versus its competitors.

discovering us in advertising to booking us online to calling our reservation agents to the time you pick up your bags when you get to your destination.

Tripodi: Retail is really the ultimate manifestation of what your brand stands for. It's the "moment of truth" for the brand. Allstate has more than 13,000 agency owners around the country, and the brand needs to live in those offices.

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ZAIN RAJ

So, retail plays a tremendous role within the context of how brands are seen and used, and what roles they play in people's lives.

Why don't more brands have identities as strong as yours?

Spiegel: Because JetBlue is seven years *young*, we were able to create an airline from scratch that is a brand at its core. Everything from the product to the uniforms to the training to the advertising—it all came from David Neeleman's vision of bringing the magic back to air travel.

So, everything was born out of the same voice and the same vision. Because we started from that place, everything evolved from there in a very consistent way, and in a way where everything comes back to the brand. I truly believe that's why JetBlue has been successful and why we have such a strong brand.

Tripodi: What's key for Allstate is that we've got to continually be relevant and re-invent what being in "good hands" actually means. Interestingly, this year Allstate celebrates its 50th anniversary with Leo Burnett as our agency-of-record. That doesn't happen nowadays.

We all know that when new CMOs arrive, the first thing they do is change the advertising and the advertising agency. The beauty of Allstate's brand identity has been its

consistency, which is at the level of our tagline—*You're in Good Hands*—as well as the hands symbol itself, which is quite iconic. The imagery has evolved to look more contemporary over the years, but the message hasn't changed.

Krug: We've had a lot of really smart marketing people working on the Visa brand for a long time—close to 20 years now. The Visa brand is also incredibly relevant, numerous times of day, to lots and lots of people. It enters your life in the morning when you stop to get your cup of coffee and a bagel, when you get gas for your car, or go online to buy a special gift for someone.

There aren't many brands that have that many touchpoints, multiple times a day, with millions and millions of people. It's also a very aspirational brand because you can do things you never thought possible. Visa can help you if you're a small-business owner who needs equipment, or someone planning an exciting trip. And it spans everything in-between.

Raj: Over the last few years, Allstate has actually launched an approach that represents a very meaningful consumer innovation. Think about the way they've structured the coverage—Accident Forgiveness—where if you drive safely, your deductibles are lower. This type of consumer-driven innovation is allowing Allstate to be seen as a brand that is valued and that has a stronger identity.



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JetBlue is the same way. They've created an innovation in the travel category, which is increasingly full of parity products. They've won distinction by offering services that you otherwise wouldn't expect from a so-called discount carrier.

The only way you differentiate and innovate in a relevant way is if you are consumer driven. You have to believe that it's not you who owns the brand; it's the consumers who allow you the opportunity to define what the brand needs to be. If you approach it from that standpoint, you can't go too far wrong. ■